

**HEBREW SCRIPTURE LESSON: PSALTER Psalm 19:7-14**

(TFWS#2016 refrain only)

R: Glorify they name, glorify they name, glorify  
they name in all the earth!

<sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect,

**reviving the soul;**

the decrees of the LORD are sure,

**making wise the simple;**

<sup>8</sup> the precepts of the LORD are right,

**rejoicing the heart;**

the commandment of the LORD is clear,

**enlightening the eyes;**

<sup>9</sup> the fear of the LORD is pure,

**enduring forever;**

the ordinances of the LORD are true

**and righteous altogether.**

<sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold,

**even much fine gold;**

sweeter also than honey,

**and drippings of the honeycomb.**

R: Glorify they name, glorify they name, glorify  
they name in all the earth!

<sup>11</sup> Moreover by them is your servant warned;

**in keeping them there is great reward.**

<sup>12</sup> But who can detect their errors?

**Clear me from hidden faults.**

<sup>13</sup> Keep back your servant also from the insolent;

**do not let them have dominion over me.**

Then I shall be blameless,

and innocent of great transgression.

<sup>14</sup> **Let the words of my mouth**

**and the meditation of my heart**

**be acceptable to you,**

**O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.**

R: Glorify they name, glorify they name, glorify  
they name in all the earth!

**GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 15:10-28****(NRSV)**

**15** <sup>10</sup> Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: <sup>11</sup> it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." <sup>12</sup> Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" <sup>13</sup> He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. <sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." <sup>15</sup> But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." <sup>16</sup> Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup> Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? <sup>18</sup> **But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."**

<sup>21</sup> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**People:** *Praise to you, Lord Christ.*

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”...“May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14) The words of my mouth; the meditation of my heart. How careful are you...with your words? Words can get you in trouble, can't they? Communication is a tricky thing. In fact, you can get yourself in trouble without ever even opening your mouth!

In Norway, Sweden, and many places in western Europe, do you know the proper way to greet someone? Sure, a handshake is always workable. But if you are being introduced to a friend's *family* or their *close friend*, you need to be *warmer*. Do you know how to be? A hug? No. *Kisses*. Often one on each cheek. A hug would be too *personal*.

If a Korean person gives you a gift, do you know how to receive it? Two hands. One hand would be considered rude.

How many of you are left handed? In Ghana, you are going to want to be extra careful to make sure you wave with your right hand. Waving with your left hand is considered an insult. That's understandable; in a country where there is little sanitation, your left hand is for your bathroom duties and your right hand is your clean hand. So, you lefties will need to eat with your right hand – especially since you often eat with your hands. But -- don't worry -- I believe you'll be allowed to *write* with your left hand.

Isn't it amazing that even before we open our mouths we can offend people without even trying?! Cultures have their rules. But, truth be told, even when we perform all the cultural rules perfectly: kiss, kiss, two hands, wave with the right -- our words don't always match up. We can put great emphasis on getting all of the form of kindness and hospitality right -- but then wound with our words. This is what Jesus is addressing in this morning in our Gospel lesson.

The purity laws in ancient Israel had a lot to say about what was the right and wrong thing to do, what and how to eat, how to dress, how to act. The conversation we overheard Jesus having with the people this morning came about because the disciples had not washed their hands before they ate and the religious authorities were complaining to Jesus about that.

Jesus understood that there are cultural norms that make things go more smoothly when they're followed, but he found this complaint a good teaching

opportunity. After all, we can get all of the customs right – and still need “our mouths washed out with soap” as my mother would say. And that’s what Jesus was seeing in these “good religious folks” who were challenging him. Their words weren’t matching up to their actions. Their words were impure, unkind, self-serving. This, Jesus said, defiled them. *What are you doing with your words?*

Have you seen the Cowboy GEICO commercial? *Two people are sitting in an automotive repair shop waiting room when one of them sees a commercial for GEICO on the TV. “Huh, 15 minutes could save you 15% or more on car insurance.” The woman replies “Everybody knows that.” The man then says “Well, did you know that words can really hurt you?” The woman doesn’t understand “What?” We cut to a western scene where a cowboy is about to ride off on his horse as a woman chases after him. “Jessie don’t go! Jessie no!” Jessie replies “I’m sorry Daisy, but I’m a loner, and a loner’s gotta be alone. Hiya!” As Jessie the cowboy rides off into the sunset the words “The End” fade in and Jessie runs right into the words, falling off of his horse.*

We laugh partly because it catches us by surprise, partly because he falls off his horse, and partly because it is so true! Words can hurt.

I am very conscious of the fact that our children are back in school. And they will be hopeful for a good year. They want to do well and they want to make friends. The truth is that some of them will be bullied. They will be *hurt by the words* that come out of another child’s mouth – whether it is in person or on social media.

When I was walking in downtown Northport one day a few years, three white preteen boys were riding their bikes around the parking lot by the water and one of them was using the “n” word. I called them over and told them that I found that offensive and that they shouldn’t be using that word. I asked them who their parents were. The offender rode off. I told the other two they’d better tell him to stop it or else I would. Can you imagine if an African American family had been in the park at the time? *Words hurt.*

When I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I was on the cross country running team. One day in practice I was running with a boy. Two other boys came along and beat him up and called him derogatory terms referring to his sexual orientation. I’m just thankful he had a pretty thick skin. *Words hurt.*

Most adults I know tell me that – even if they had a great childhood – they’d never want to live it again. Childhood is that time of life when we most learn by trial and error. Children say mean words and *then* realize the damage they do. And they receive mean words and are hurt by them. The hope is that we grow out of this stage; the truth is that we might just struggle with it for our entire life.

Let me remind you that Jesus wasn’t talking to *children* this morning; he was talking to *adults*. He is talking to *us*. “It is what comes *out* of the mouth that defiles,” he says. *Mind your words*.

- Someone once said, “Be sure to taste your words before you spit them out.”
- Another said, “Don’t mix bad words with your bad mood. You’ll have many opportunities to change a mood, but you’ll never get the opportunity to replace the words you spoke.”
- Indian philosopher, Ritu Ghatourey, reminds us that, “We should learn to choose our words carefully, as we can hurt, and mislead others. Words... can’t be taken back, once you give them away. Harsh words are like bullets: no matter what, they can still leave a painful injury. And sometimes, a ‘sorry’ is not enough to heal the wounds you leave.”

As Jesus explains, “What comes out of the *mouth* proceeds from the *heart*...and *this* is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These,” he explains, “are what defiles a person.”

I suppose that’s the thing to remember. What we say...reflects our...*heart*. We want to think sometimes that words are just words. We “don’t really mean it”. We’re “just blowing off steam”. But even *those* words those “I-don’t-really-mean-what-I’m-saying-right-now; I’m-just-hopping-mad” words will be interpreted by another as our *heart*.

Don’t leave anyone thinking that that’s your heart. You have so much more to give! You have so many more ways to love, to serve, to give, and to live. God calls us to manage our words so that all may know grace.

I am always really intrigued by the juxtaposition of this message of Jesus’ right next to the story about the Canaanite woman who appealed for Jesus’ help. I’m never sure whether it is an example of Jesus learning the lesson of

how he is using his words, or if he's modeling it for his disciples by saying what they might say and seeing the hurt it causes.

Let's put ourselves in the disciples' shoes. We're traveling on foot through the countryside. Our walk is long and hard. We're likely having conversations with each other, maybe telling stories. Suddenly, this woman appears on the side of the road. She is hollering! She is shouting. She is persistent. She is a mother with a sick daughter – one who is tormented by a demon. She knows full well who Jesus is and that he can save her child. He is walking through her countryside. She is not going to waste this opportunity. She's going to get help for her daughter. So she hollers and shouts.

Can you imagine it? You're just trying to walk there, and yet minute by minute, quarter hour by quarter hour, you cannot get away from this noise! So you go up to your teacher, Jesus, and you say, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."

Jesus takes this challenge on. He tells her, "I wasn't sent for you; only for Israel." Now imagine being the woman. What might you respond. "Oh, excuse me, too-big-for-your-britches!" Then throw in a few -- what I like to call "New York" expressions complete with hand gestures, and walk away.

After all, the words Jesus used were hurtful. It would be natural for her to come back with more hurtful words. But that's not what she does, is it? No. Her words reflect her heart. Her actions reflect her heart. She kneels before him and asks, "Lord, help me." He tests her further. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Imagine him saying that to you!? Throw it back in his face! You know you want to! I mean, honestly! You were humble! You tried! And still, he provoked you! He deserves the response you give him! Meany!

This woman is not part of their "in crowd". I see his disciples high-fiving each other; he's told her. But, *I think* he just *might* be teaching them a lesson about their assumptions, because I believe he has already ascertained her heart. He's just going to give her a chance to speak it.

She doesn't lose ground. She doesn't spew expletives back. She speaks words that show Jesus her heart: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." With those words, a miracle was performed and her daughter healed.

Words harm. Words heal. What are you doing with yours?

A young woman named, Macey, posted these words on the internet four weeks ago. She said, "If I had the chance to hurt you like you hurt me...I wouldn't take it." And I hear Jesus say, "Woman, great is your faith!"

Are you doing harm with your words? What are you doing with your words when you feel someone has harmed you? Are you harming them back? Where does it end?

I do believe that God is looking at the heart within us and how our words reflect it. It's hard. It takes strength. It takes tenacity. It requires sacrifice. And, yet, it will be the thing that will allow you to sleep well each night.

Words harm. Words heal. What are you doing with yours?

Let's go back to the insert of a Psalter this morning, and find that last verse: verse 14. The one that begins with "Let the words of my mouth..."; and let's say them together...

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

Blessings on the journey. Amen.